

Fuel 4 Women



KSC/CCAFS HEALTH EDUCATION AND WELLNESS PROGRAM

Body Image January 2006

WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

As women, we all want to look and feel our best. This is not always easy, considering the busy life today's woman leads and the many responsibilities she may have. It can be tough to find time for exercising and eating right, not to mention controlling stress! Developing and nurturing a positive body image and a healthy mental attitude is crucial to a woman's happiness and wellness.



What is body image?

- How you perceive your physical appearance
- How you feel about your appearance
- How you feel about your body
- How you think others see you

Why are so many women unhappy with their bodies? Women in the U.S. are under pressure to measure up to a certain social and cultural ideal of beauty, which can lead to poor body image. We are bombarded with media images of female bodies that are extremely thin and with flawless features. These images can reinforce an already negative image a woman might have of her body, leading her to believe she is overweight and not able to meet the American standard.

Other pressure can come from people in our lives. Family and friends can influence a woman's body image with positive and negative comments. Doctors can also have a powerful impact on body image. Their comments, in particular, might be delivered as health advice but can be misinterpreted and affect how a woman perceives and feels about her body. As a result, the way women feel about their bodies can impact their physical and emotional health. Women with a poor body image may try to lose weight in unhealthy ways, restrict their eating, develop eating disorders, and have low self-esteem.

How many times have you heard women around you complaining about the way that they look or asking if they look too fat? In a Glamour magazine survey, 75% of women ages 18-35 believe they were fat but only 25% were medically overweight (the same percentage as overweight men) and 45% of underweight women say that they were too fat (from *Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf).

With a positive body image, a person has a real perception of her size and shape and feels comfortable and proud about her body. With a negative body image, a person has a distorted perception of her shape and size, compares her body to others, and feels shame, awkwardness, and anxiety about her body.

ACTIVITY

Write the first word or words that come to mind when you read the following words:

Fat _____
Hips _____
Stomach _____
Thighs _____
Buttock _____
Overweight _____

For the word fat, did you think of a substance necessary for the proper functioning of the major organs, including the brain? Or for the word thighs, did you think of a major muscle group necessary for walking upright? Unfortunately the words usually associated with our body parts are negative in connotation. Individuals are usually more comfortable talking about those parts of the body they dislike than those they do like.

QUICK FACTS

- Women who strive for less than 15% of ideal body weight are at risk for anorexia nervosa. Anorexia is a serious, life-threatening disorder of deliberate self-starvation.
- Bulimia involves periodic episodes of uncontrollable, excessive eating or binge eating, followed by self-induced vomiting or other purgative behaviors.
- Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a serious illness when a person is preoccupied with minor or imaginary physical flaws, usually of the skin, hair, and nose. A person with BDD tends to have cosmetic surgery, and even if the surgeries are successful, does not think they are and is unhappy with the outcomes.



COSMETIC SURGERY

According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, more than 8.7 million cosmetic surgery procedures were done in 2003. The number of cosmetic procedures is rising,

and far more women are getting plastic surgery than men. These are the top five procedures women had in 2003:

- Liposuction
- Breast augmentation
- Nose reshaping
- Eyelid surgery
- Facelift



As the demand grows for cosmetic surgery, consumers must realize that all cosmetic procedures—even ones that may seem simple—carry risks. If you are thinking about having cosmetic surgery, become an informed consumer about the procedure and its risks. Select a qualified doctor. Have realistic expectations about the results and know the benefits and limitations of surgery.

Procedure/What is it?	Risks
Liposuction Excess fat from a targeted area is removed with a vacuum to shape the body.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• baggy skin• skin may change color and fall off• fluid retention• shock• infection• burning• fat clots in the lungs• pain• damage to organs if punctured• numbness at the surgery site• heart problems• kidney problems• disability• death
Breast augmentation Breasts are enlarged by placing an implant behind each breast.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• implants can rupture, leak, and deflate• infection• hardening of scar tissue around implant, causing breast firmness, pain, distorted shape, or implant movement• bleeding

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pain • nipples may get more or less sensitive • numbness near incision • blood collection around implant/incision • calcium deposits around implant • harder to find breast lumps
Nose surgery Nose is reshaped by resculpting the bone and cartilage in the nose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection • bursting blood vessels • red spots • bleeding under the skin • scarring
Eyelid surgery Extra fat, skin, and muscle in the upper and/or lower eyelid are removed to correct “droopy” eyelids.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blurred or double vision • infection • bleeding under the skin • swelling • dry eyes • whiteheads • can’t close eye completely • pulling of lower lids • blindness
Facelift Extra fat is removed, muscles are tightened, and skin is rewrapped around the face and neck to improve sagging facial skin, jowls, and loose neck skin.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection • bleeding under skin • scarring • irregular earlobes • nerve damage causing numbness or inability to move your face • hair loss • skin damage

15 WAYS TO CREATE A BODY POSITIVE WORLD



1. Encourage positive comments and try to avoid negative comments, about your own and other people's bodies.
2. Participate in physical activities that make you feel good about yourself without making anyone else feel bad about their body.
3. Try not to make judgmental comments about food, calories, dieting, and weight. People of all sizes have issues around these and you never know how you will affect people with your comments.
4. Learn the facts and challenge the myths on size and bodies.
5. Compliment people more often on their ideas, personality and accomplishments than on their appearance and physical being.
6. Try to think of bodies as whole, functional units, rather than breaking them down into parts. Instead of saying "I'm unhappy with my thighs," say, "I'm pleased that my body is capable of doing this activity well."
7. Don't participate in, encourage, or laugh at jokes that make fun of a person's size or body.
8. Accept all types of bodies as beautiful and challenge limiting societal standard of beauty.
9. Learn about eating disorders and seek help if you suspect that you or a friend has a problem.
10. Wear the clothes that you like and feel comfortable in, rather than what you think makes you look "too fat" or "too thin."
11. Try to eat when you are hungry, enjoy your food, and take pleasure in the process of eating, without guilt or stress over what you are eating.
12. Object to gender-based assumptions on how bodies should look, such as "women should be thin" or "men should be muscular."
13. Support organizations and activists who work for positive body image and ending sizism.
14. Teach kids at a young age that they are beautiful just as they are!
15. Understand that size and body oppression relates to other forms of oppression, such as sexism, racism, and homophobia and then challenge all types of oppression.

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- ♦ *Educating woman about their health*
- ♦ *Encouraging woman to act against disease*

HTTP://HEWP.KSC.NASA.GOV

RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Office on Women's Health

www.womenshealth.gov

Our Bodies Ourselves

<http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/book/chapter.asp?id=1>

Body Positive

<http://www.bodypositive.com/>

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